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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 007124

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SUBJECT: FRENCH ON CHAVEZ VISIT TO PARIS

REF: STATE 186100

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) PolOff discussed reftel points with MFA Venezuela Desk Officer Lionel Paradisi on October 17 following an October 7 meeting on Venezuela that included MFA WHA A/S-equivalent Daniel Parfait, DAS-equivalent Michel Pinard, and Paradisi (septel). The GoF confirmed that Chavez will visit Paris, arriving either late October 18 or early October 19, and will depart October 20. Chavez's visit includes meetings with the Prime Minister, the President, and MEDEF (Movement of French Enterprises), France's employers' association.

2. (C) Both Parfait and Pinard pledged the GoF would deliver a strong message urging Chavez to proceed with prudence and moderation, and to caution him about the effect property expropriations could have on his reputation overseas and on foreign investment. Pinard said that the GoF would counsel Chavez to use oil largesse for improving the lot of the poor and the infrastructure of the country rather than for funding campaigns such as that of Evo Morales in Bolivia. He also promised that France would caution Chavez about his links to countries such as Cuba and Iran, indicating the latter would certainly come up as a result of French participation in the EU3 effort.

3. (C) According to Paradisi, French assistance to Venezuela is limited to cooperation in cultural, education, and scientific areas. The GoF supports sending EU observers to Venezuela for the December 4 elections, provided they are given assurances they will be able to freely conduct their work. MFA contacts will meet with Venezuelan NGO Sumate October 18, before the Chavez visit. The GoF has promised a readout of the visit after its completion.

4. (C) COMMENT: Although claiming to share our concerns and seemingly alarmed by possible regional instability, the GoF has determined that Chavez is likely to remain in power for the foreseeable future and has thus chosen engagement over open confrontation. The GoF downplays the threat posed by recent Venezuelan arms and military purchases and view the human rights situation in Venezuela as better than in many other countries -- specifically Colombia. It is our view that the GoF may confront Chavez about meddling in the affairs of neighboring countries and his overtures to Iran, but it is unlikely that its message on human rights will be particularly hard hitting. END COMMENT.  
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